



Children's  
Rights Alliance  
for England

## State of Children's Rights in London – the launch of a new report

On 6<sup>th</sup> March, CRAE launched a ground-breaking new report analysing the extent to which public bodies in London are ensuring that children enjoy their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Report drew on a combination of: freedom of information requests; official statistics; information from grassroots and community organisations; and evidence gathered directly from children. The Report compared practices and outcomes for children's rights across all 32 London boroughs and the City of London.

The launch at the Museum of London brought together a cross-section of London's policymakers, politicians, voluntary and community organisations and young people including ***cabinet members for children from Lambeth and Hammersmith and Fulham, London Assembly members and staff, the Metropolitan Police, Kids Company, Save the Children, Children England, NSPCC, Barnardo's and local organisations such as London Citizens and London Play.***

CRAE Trustee **Bill Badham** chaired the event and reminded attendees that for children's rights to have a real, positive impact on the *"lived lives of children"* it is crucial to know what is happening on a local level – including in different neighbourhoods across London. He made a passionate plea for policymakers and politicians in London to act on the Report's findings, address the disparities identified in the research and lead the way nationally on children's human rights.

**Carla Garnelas**, CRAE's Head of Policy and Public Affairs, said the Report showed *"children living in the same city are experiencing vastly different treatment, depending on where they happen to grow up"* and outlined some of the staggering differences in outcomes for children across London including:

### Criminal Justice

- Freedom of information requests submitted by CRAE showed that the use of tasers on children in London increased nearly six-fold between 2008 and 2012. In total, police in London tasered children 131 times in this period. Police in Croydon, Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham between them tasered children 51 times – 40% of the total.
- The research also revealed that, on average, 91 children are stopped and searched each week in Southwark compared with 19 per week in Hillingdon, Kingston upon Thames, Merton and Sutton.

### Children in Care

- In Barking and Dagenham 42% of looked after children are not in employment, education or training when they reach 19, whilst in Tower Hamlets and Sutton the equivalent figure is 16%.
- Although, looked after children should have the opportunity to influence the way in which children's services are run via Children in Care Councils, freedom of Information requests found that in 2012 there were no meetings at all between the Children in Care Council and the Director of Children's Services in five boroughs (Barnet, Hackney, Havering, Kensington and Chelsea and Wandsworth), compared with 12 such meetings in Harrow and seven in Haringey.

### Living Standards

- Despite this being illegal, 521 homeless children in London were living in B&Bs for longer than six weeks in the third quarter of 2013, accounting for 71% of the total in England. More

than half of those were the responsibility of just three local authorities – Ealing, Hounslow and Tower Hamlets.

## Education

- In Kensington and Chelsea, the attainment gap at GCSE between children eligible for free school meals and others is extraordinarily low (4.2%). In Kingston upon Thames and Sutton it is over 35%.
- In Havering just over 20% of children with special educational needs gain 5+ good GCSEs, while more than 50% of children in Westminster do so.

Carla pointed out that CRAE's research showed "*children do far better in some boroughs than others, and this is not always linked to obvious explanations such as low child poverty or crime rates. This suggests that local authorities can have a big impact on many of the problems facing children in London*". To harness this potential for positive change, CRAE called on all public bodies in London, particularly poorly performing local authorities, to identify and learn from neighbouring boroughs that are serving children better and to come up with robust action plans to ensure children's human rights are better protected.



Baroness Jenny Jones and Jennette Arnold OBE speaking at the launch

**Baroness Jenny Jones**, of the Green Party and member of both the London Assembly and the House of Lords supported CRAE's focus on achieving change at a local level saying that, in her experience, "*legislation is not always the best way to deal with children's rights.*" Given her role on the Mayor's Policing and Crime Committee, Baroness Jones went on to talk about the findings in CRAE's Report on the use of stop and search on children and young people. She pointed out that the "*heavy-handed use of stop and search has been counter-productive for future generations of Londoners and has harmed their relationship with the police*". Having flagged up the lack of specific guidance from ACPO, or other policing bodies, on stop and search of children she pointed out that what was also missing from current arrangements was any feedback from children or any understanding of the impact that stop and search has on children. She urged the Metropolitan Police to address this - including by involving young people in training for officers on stop and search.

**Jennette Arnold OBE**, a London Assembly member for the Labour party, drew on her experience of equalities work and her role on the Assembly's Education Panel to scrutinise the Report's findings on the wide variation in attainment between different boroughs. She explained the importance of local authorities "*drilling down*" into the figures to understand and address the issues they presented for the services they provide to children. Jennette expressed her concern to understand how the overarching figures could be broken down to understand the particular impact on different ethnic groups in London – including gypsy and traveller children. As well as using the Report's findings to inform the work of the Education Panel, Jennette pledged to share them with key policymakers at City Hall and lead Cabinet members for Children and Families in Hackney, Islington and Waltham Forest (the boroughs she represents).

A lively Question and Answer session with attendees at the launch addressed issues as diverse as: funding for supplementary schools; the particular situation of bi-lingual children in London; children as young carers; sexual violence against girls; and the ability of local authorities to pick up on and tackle cases where, although there was no violence or sexual abuse, children were suffering from neglect due to a lack of adequate food or clothing.

The launch was followed by tailored training event for voluntary and community sector organisations working with children in London. More than 20 participants took the opportunity to learn about:

- Children's rights;
- How children's rights are being realised across the capital;
- Local government's responsibilities for children's rights; and
- Using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in campaigning for change.

The practical training drew on the research in CRAE's Report to examine the human rights issues raised by the findings on criminal justice, play, education and family. The action-based focus of the session encouraged participants to work together to come up with real campaign strategies for addressing the disparities identified in the Report.

The feedback from the session was overwhelmingly positive. All participants said they had learnt more about the UNCRC including one who appreciated learning about "*arguments to use and how to organise campaigns grounded in children's rights*". Many participants said they would share the Report's findings with colleagues and consider how to use them to improve protection of children's rights in London saying "*I will definitely have the CRC in mind more often while working [with children]*" and "*I work with young people in different ways and think after this session I will be able to advocate for them more effectively*".

Organisations are already picking up and using the Report's findings. For example, Amnesty issued its own press release and we are looking forward to speaking at a London Policy Network meeting organised by Partnership for Young London, the regional youth unit for London, a network of youth organisations across London consisting of local authorities, voluntary and community, and private sector organisations.

The Report received good coverage in the press, on the radio, television and online including locally in the Evening Standard, Metro, BBC London TV and Radio news and LBC radio and nationally in the Independent, the Express and ITV news. The Report was also picked up and discussed on Twitter with more than 65 tweets about the Report including comments and conversations involving London MPs, London Assembly members, Councillors and prospective candidates for the local elections in May.

CRAE will continue to disseminate the Report's findings and to work with colleagues in voluntary and community organisations to press for change with London's policymakers and politicians. Particularly in the run-up to the local elections in May 2014, we want to ensure that not only do decision-makers have a greater awareness of the children's rights issues affecting children in London but also act on their obligations under the UNCRC. We are delighted to have been awarded additional funding from Trust for London to build on the Report and take forward advocacy and other activities over the coming year.

To read a copy of the Report, go to: [www.crae.org.uk/publications-resources/state-of-childrens-rights-in-london](http://www.crae.org.uk/publications-resources/state-of-childrens-rights-in-london). To keep up to date on the next phase of CRAE's Trust for London funded project please email Anna Edmundson, Policy and Programmes Manager ([aedmundson@crae.org.uk](mailto:aedmundson@crae.org.uk)).

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